



Photo by Susan Traxel Martin

Whitetail deer have excellent senses of smell and hearing. Their large ears are constantly alert and move about like a radar antennae. They use their acute senses to locate and monitor predators and other animals. Their sense of smell is also used to locate food. At Philpott Lake, deer feed on many types of woodland twigs, honeysuckle, grasses, weeds, and they particularly love acorns in the Fall.

Be very careful operating your vehicles and boats while in the Philpott area.

Deer frequently cross our park roads and are very strong swimmers. They are often observed swimming across the lake and are inhabitants of the islands on Philpott Lake.



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Ten Fast Facts About the Whitetail

1. The whitetail deer is the most plentiful big game animal in North America.
2. Deer are more plentiful now than when Columbus discovered America.
3. Shed antlers are difficult to find because rodents quickly eat them.
4. There are 17 subspecies of whitetail deer in North America.
5. When a fawn is born it has no scent, giving it protection from predators.
6. The fawn is born with a color pattern which provides a natural camouflage.
7. Deer communicate with each other by making various vocalizations.
8. A deer's sense of smell is over 2000 times greater than man's.
9. Over 1/4 million deer die annually in VA from unnatural causes.
10. Hunting is necessary for population and disease control.

Whitetail Deer

Philpott Lake



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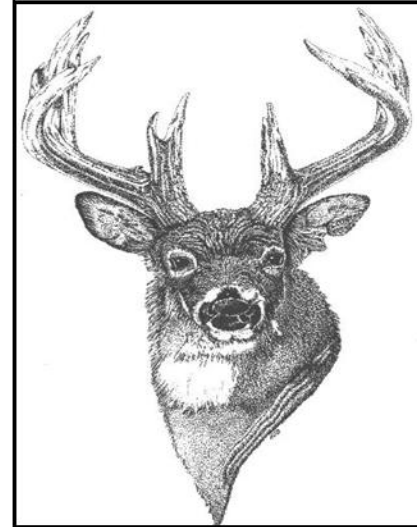
The **whitetail deer** was extremely important to the early settlers, providing food and skins for clothing and trading. Deer were hunted so much by settlers and professional hunters that they were on the brink of extinction by 1900. Through sound game management principles, the passage and strict enforcement of game laws, and restocking programs, the whitetail deer numbers are at an all time high. Today, deer populations must be controlled through regulated hunting. The deer are their own worst enemies because they can eat all available food in a particular area, leading to mass starvation during the low food periods of the winter months. Left unchecked, the deer population can double in a single year. Deer browse rather than graze. The deer will move constantly while eating, instead of standing still and grazing like a cow. In areas of overpopulation, deer will create an over browsing effect called a browse-line. In these areas, all vegetation will be stripped bare up to a height of 6 feet. When viewed from a distance, a distinct line of no vegetation will be seen. Thanks to sound, aggressive management by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Philpott Lake has a stable, healthy deer herd.

The male deer is called a buck, the female a doe and the baby is a fawn. Around the Philpott area, a mature buck will have an average weight of 150 lbs., while the doe will usually weigh 100-120 lbs. The doe will have a single fawn during her first birth and usually twins each following year. Just two deer, with no predation, can produce a herd of approximately 40 deer in only 7 years. Deer can live in the wild for up to 11 years.



Deer need food, water, and cover to survive. If they have these things and are undisturbed, they will live in an area of only 1 square mile (640 acres) for their entire life. Deer establish a territory and will not leave; they have been known to starve to death rather than leave their territory when their food supply was depleted. In the fall, a buck will display his set of newly grown antlers. The buck will use his antlers to mark his territory by scraping bark from small saplings and as weapons to fight rival bucks for dominance to obtain does during the fall mating season, or rut. At Philpott, bucks begin growing their antlers in early Spring. They are mature by early Fall.

While growing, the antlers are covered by a fuzzy, skin-like material known as velvet. The velvet is rich with vessels, carrying blood and nutrients to the rapidly growing antlers. The velvet dries and falls off when the antlers mature.



Antlers are the fastest growing tissue in the animal world. Most bucks in this area usually shed their antlers in late December to mid-January. In early times, our ancestors used deer ant-

lers as weapons, tools, and in religious ceremonies. Bucks have probably evolved to shed their antlers annually so they can replace damage in the form of broken beams and points or tines. Damage is usually a result of fighting with other bucks.

